

## APPENDIX 5

# VISUAL ARTS TOUR CASE STUDY

*SURFACE TENSION;*  
A TOURING EXHIBITION  
CURATED BY CATHERINE  
BOWE, WEXFORD ARTS  
CENTRE, 2007

FOR THE TOURING EXPERIMENT  
**BY CATHERINE MARSHALL**

*“I feel as if I am working backwards,  
you’d really need a year to research  
the show” - Producer and Curator of  
Surface Tension.*

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## Methodology

The information presented in this case study was gathered during a number of meetings and interviews with the curator, Catherine Bowe and other key participants.

A number of telephone conversations and email exchanges also took place between the curator, the artists, the Director and Board of the Wexford Arts Centre and the author. Conversations and correspondence between the author and key personnel at each of the participating venues also took place throughout the process of the tour to date. Throughout this text the abbreviations *TTE* for *The Touring Experiment* and WAC for Wexford Arts Centre may apply.

The schedule of meetings is as follows;

Catherine Bowe met with Alastar Mac Aongusa, Eimear Caomhananch and the author at the Davenport Hotel, Dublin, 2 /7/2007

The author attended a meeting with the artists, Catherine Bowe and Cliodhna Shaffrey to discuss the catalogue, Wexford Arts Centre, 9/8/07

The author interviewed Catherine Bowe, Curator, Elizabeth Whyte, Director, WAC and Karla Sanchez O'Connell, Chairman, WAC at the WAC, 10/9/07

The author met with Nicola Henley, Pauline McNamara and Ann O'Driscoll, Raheen Community Hospital, and Siobhan Mulcahy, Arts Officer, Clare County Council, at Raheen, 2/10/07

The author attended a meeting with the artists, the curator, the Technician from WAC, and Jacinta Lynch, Director, Broadstone Studios, at Broadstone, Dublin, 15/10/07

The author attended the opening of the exhibition, *Surface Tension*, at Broadstone Studios, 13/12/07 and a panel discussion there on Saturday 12 /1/ 2008.

The author met with Catherine Bowe on Monday at the National Gallery of Ireland, 21/1/ 2008.

The exhibition already existed prior to the public invitation to visual arts curators/producers to participate in the second round of *The Touring Experiment* and was turned into a tour, rather than envisaged as a touring exhibition from the outset. This case study does not investigate the development of the exhibition.

Unless it is stated otherwise, all quotations used throughout this text are taken from the case study interview on 10/9/07 which was recorded.

## Introduction

*Surface Tension*, an Exhibition of work by the artists Gerda Teljeur, Jane Jermyn and Juliana Walters, curated by Catherine Bowe and presented by the Wexford Arts Centre was chosen as the *TTE* artform case study for Visual Arts for a number of reasons. Since it was a group show, made up of the work of three different artists whose practices embrace very different artistic approaches, it offered an opportunity to test audience reaction across their practices, and to see if there were any particular issues specific to touring a group exhibition of this nature. In addition the choice of venues selected for this tour enabled the research team of *TTE* to look at the issues arising from working with a non-traditional art venue, a venue closely linked to a studio complex and thus, to professional engagement with peer artists with different practices, as well as two publicly-funded art centres. It offered a wide geographic spread in Ireland, mixing urban and rural, private and public, traditional and non-traditional art venues and the curator had a well-considered range of outreach projects to accompany the tour.<sup>1</sup>

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1           Initially the tour was to travel to the Gallery at Lismore Castle, which is a privately run gallery, with an international programme, an international audience and admission charges.

## Section 1 – The context of the tour

### The Curator/Producer

Catherine Bowe, the Curator of *Surface Tension* and curator/manager of its subsequent tour is an artist herself. She graduated with an honours degree in Fine Art Practice from the Crawford College of Art & Design, in 1998, winning the graduate studio residency award at the Blackwater Studios, Cork. She was awarded an M.A. in Fine Art Practice from the National College of Art & Design in 2003 and worked at the Arnolfini Art Gallery, Bristol, England; as Public Art Administrator, Wexford County Council, and as Acting Director in Tallaght Community Arts Centre, Dublin before taking on the role of Visual Arts Manager at the Wexford Arts Centre.

Wexford Arts Centre undertook an organisational review in 2005 and reopened under new management and with a completely new staff in February 2006, one of the main aims of the Board and new management was to establish a strong visual arts exhibition and education programme. Arising out of this organisational review, the new role of Visual Arts Manager was established with Catherine Bowe as the first occupant of the position.

### The Exhibition

The exhibition, *Surface Tension*, emerged from one of Catherine Bowe's first tasks as Visual Arts Manager in Wexford Arts Centre. The Centre invited submissions from local and national visual artists in early 2006. Out of the proposals submitted, the work of two artists Gerda Teljeur from Co. Wexford and Jane Jermyn who lives and works in west Waterford were chosen for a group show, and a third artist, Juliana Walters was invited to show. The exhibition was selected with the Wexford Arts Centre gallery spaces in mind but from the outset Catherine Bowe wanted to maximise the opportunities for the artists arising from it. The exhibition brings together the work of three artists with very different arts practices and very different exhibiting requirements. Gerda Teljeur works mainly with drawing and mark-making, creating very large abstract works on paper that are closely related to unconscious emotional and physical impulses. Their apparent formlessness is subtly questioned by the intensity of the marks in certain parts of the work, which sometimes bear resemblances to aspects of nature. Three-dimensional form, on the other hand is central to the object based work of ceramic artist Jane Jermyn. Jermyn's large pods and standing forms also have an organic reference and the artist likes to display them in groups on the floor of the gallery, without the usual sculptural framework of pedestals or plinths. The third artist, Juliana Walters, works across a wide variety of media and in a more forthrightly conceptual manner. While her work is, at first sight, very different to the more intuitive and traditional practices of Teljeur and Jermyn, Wexford Arts Centre sensitively exploited its two gallery spaces, showing Walters' video work, sculpture and mixed media drawings/paintings in a separate gallery, giving the visitor the opportunity to make their own overall connections between the three artists.

The tour of *Surface Tension* grew out of discussion in relation to that successful exhibition at the Wexford Arts Centre, from 10th February to 10th March 2007, and the inclusion of visual arts into Round 2 of *The Touring Experiment*. Following its initial exposure in Wexford the exhibition toured to Raheen, Co. Clare from 10th September to 4th. October 2007 and Broadstone Studios from 14th December 2007 to 13th January 2008. It will travel to The Source Arts Centre in Thurles in April and was initially planned to finish in the Dunamase Arts Centre in Portlaoise in June 2008<sup>2</sup>. Following its successful application to *The Touring Experiment*, *Surface Tension* was granted €35, 650. 75.

Although the decision to tour the exhibition was not part of the original plan, when the opportunity presented itself through the second round of *The Touring Experiment* Catherine Bowe saw this as a way to further promote the three artists. She was fully supported from the very beginning by the Executive Director of Wexford Arts Centre, Elizabeth Whyte and the Board of Management.

### **Wexford Arts Centre**

Wexford Arts Centre has a well-established history. It was set up 1974 and is therefore one of the first arts centres in the country. It occupies a 19th century building close to the centre of the town, and in 2005 the Centre began a substantial re-structuring, both of its own organisation and of the building. Over the years the centre has provided a reliable service to the people of Wexford and their visitors with an emphasis on literary, theatrical and musical events. Since the 1960s the town has hosted one of the finest Opera festivals in Europe, the Wexford Opera Festival, which has a distinguished history of bringing some of the best singers and conductors to the county, and in its wake, a burgeoning fringe festival of cultural events across all the artforms. The Arts Centre is determined to provide a real presence for visual arts also. As Catherine Bowe put it, '*Overall it is important that Wexford Arts Centre establishes itself as having a good, curated visual arts programme*'.

While the centre had participated as a receiver in touring exhibitions in the past and had happily provided a venue for touring performing artists neither Catherine Bowe the curator of *Surface Tension* nor the Centre had any history of originating touring exhibitions of visual art. The decision to embark on this course of action with *Surface Tension* was enabled through funding from *TTE* and was very much seen by the Centre as a way of claiming their place as a serious participant in Irish visual arts culture and as a means of testing the process for the future. The experimental nature of *TTE* provided a supportive framework for learning on all sides and encouraged the Centre to embark on a process that Wexford Arts Centre had not tested previously. Bowe stresses how valuable the experimental nature of this project was. '*We {artists and curator} weren't afraid that it wasn't always going to go to plan*'.

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2      Dunamase Arts Centre in Portlaoise was one of the venues originally selected for the tour. The exhibition at this venue was later cancelled. See proposed final venue.

## Section 2

### Aims and Objectives

The Wexford Arts Centre wanted to position itself as a place where visual arts were taken very seriously, providing a professional service to both artists and public alike, through well curated exhibitions and outreach programmes. *The Touring Experiment* offered the centre an opportunity to test the ground as far as visual arts touring was concerned. Surface Tension, their first art tour, would give an opportunity to put theory into practice, to show their commitment to visual arts, to see what the process of touring a show originated by WAC was really like, and to test their own skills and professionalism outside their own familiar locale. The opportunity to learn about the process of touring became an end in itself. Karla Sanchez O'Connell, art historian and Chairman of the Board of Wexford Arts Centre fully encouraged the Curator and Director in the project.

*'For the Board it is very important that Wexford Arts Centre is at a level of excellence that allows it to put forward shows of really high quality ... that can tour around Ireland, that can show other people what is being done here... but also for us to see how to improve the infrastructure we have here, that it is good enough to do the job.'*

Elizabeth Whyte and the Board saw the opportunity to tour their show as a means of promoting the WAC to professionals in the field, both artists, curators and critics, and, simultaneously, to a number of different publics. This was a particularly strong motivator for them in the light of their recent re-structuring process. They were enthusiastic about now presenting the Centre as an energetic and pro-active player in the visual arts, not just in Wexford but across the country and they proposed to test these objectives by touring to venues with very different profiles. As she explained,

*'We are going through a transitional phase ... For the last year and a half the Centre was closed for a restructuring of management and a restructuring of our mission as a multidisciplinary arts centre, with a particular emphasis on professional art, the promotion of emerging artists as well, both in Wexford and at a national level and with a contemporary focus. For us when the opportunity arose to participate in The Touring Experiment it was an opportunity to put the WAC's name out there as a brand of excellence, with artists of high quality. Gerda (Teljeur) is an established artist but you could say they are all still emerging.. Two of the artists are Wexford based and Jane (Jermyn) is from Cork but she is still a regional artist as well, and regional artists probably don't get as much of a chance to tour as Dublin artists. We wanted to give them that opportunity, to tour under our name. {author's emphasis}'*

The original exhibition at Wexford was presented to a broad cross-section of the local public, approximately 700 of whom visited the show. The plan now

was to try it out in different locations, e.g. in a venue with a strong pro-active community profile, a venue that was known to attract very professional audiences and at least one other venue catering for a more general audience but not depending on their local reputation. As Catherine Bowe said, *'We always strive to get the widest audience and the artists are always interested in professional opportunities.'*

Catherine Bowe's route to increasing audiences and to raising the profile of the centre was through artistic excellence. She wanted to maximise the opportunities for promotion and career development for the artists. *'If you broaden the artist's experience and your own, hopefully the audience will grow out of that. From the artist's point of view it's very important to give them the opportunity to do this tour and to participate in the different aspects of the tour... For instance, at Raheen, especially. They met the challenge of Raheen very well... When it first became an option they didn't know what to think because Raheen is not a conventional gallery space but after a couple of meetings they really became very enthusiastic about it and they met the challenge of it... I have seen them become more resourceful because of the tour. I think for the artists also it is very good because our budget is a little bit limited... So they have become administrators as well as looking at installing their own exhibitions. I think it will equip them with the tools to go further with their own work in future...They have learned a great deal...'* Bowe believes that by gaining a reputation for artistic excellence, both in terms of the artist's development and the public presentation of it the centre will ultimately benefit. *'It's about what we can give them. We want to be seen as enabling. If we can give the artists our administrative, technical and curatorial skills, the better our branding will become. The more we focus on excellence the more our audiences will grow.'*

Karla Sanchez O'Connell, Chairman of Wexford Arts Centre, also saw touring as an enormous learning opportunity for the artists,

*'It is very important to give artists opportunities to learn other skills... they don't always learn these things in their training as visual artists, or if they do they sometimes forget. It is very important for them to know how an exhibition comes together. We were talking before and saying that in future it will be good to have a discussion with the artists at the very beginning and to tell them what probably is going to happen throughout and how the tour comes together and what they might have to do.'*

Coming to Wexford from abroad Sanchez O'Connell was keenly conscious that Irish artists and curators did not have the same opportunities to travel and learn from the interchanges that travelling and touring offered as arts practitioners in other countries. She felt that the experience of seeing their work in different physical environments and shown to very different audiences and the chance to meet with other artists would be beneficial.

*“When a tour goes it allows for a great exchange of ideas. It’s fundamental for artists to be able see what others are doing in a different region of the country. It’s very important to allow for the exchange of ideas. The artists learn a lot from seeing how the different audiences react, they also learn a lot from the different spaces.”*

This was fully endorsed later by the artists who were particularly affected by their experience of their first tour venue.

### **The Assumptions and Expectations of the Curator/Producer**

Catherine Bowe admitted that she had certain expectations about the standard of facilities in each of the proposed venues but found that there was a wider range of difference in provision than she had anticipated, and which only became apparent when she paid site visits and spoke face to face with the venue managers. Attitudes to engagement and outreach were also different and while these were anticipated at the planning stage, the reality still proved to be both surprising and challenging.

For example, the exhibition and workshops at Raheen Community Hospital required a flexible and considered approach from the artists, two of whom had not worked in the health sector previously. As the tour progressed each venue has brought a new set of challenges and has encouraged not only the artists, but Wexford Arts Centre to think creatively about each venue and its audience.

## Section 3 - The Tour

*'Each space commands and warrants a fresh approach and often a different audience. Therefore I felt that it was important to treat each stage of the tour as a new project, rethinking the work each time'. (J. Walters, email to author, 15/1/2008)*

Catherine Bowe applied to TTE for support to tour to 4 venues, Raheen Community Hospital, Lismore Castle Gallery, and The Source and Dunamais Arts Centres in Thurles and Portlaoise.<sup>3</sup> The choice of venues was significantly influenced by what was available between the inception of the idea and the very short timespan of *The Touring Experiment's* application process, from early February to March 16th 2007.

The short lead-in time was a great challenge to the curator, the artists and the other venue managers. It affected every aspect of the planning process for the tour, impacting on venue choices, the selection of work for each venue, outreach activities, and the promotion of the tour since it meant that there was little time to plan formal contractual agreements, carry out site visits and flesh out a tour plan in detail. Bowe was very constrained by the lack of time for the initial research. *'I feel as if I am working backwards'*, she said, *'you'd really need a year to research the show'*<sup>4</sup>. This view was to be repeatedly endorsed by the three artists.

One particularly problematic but unforeseen outcome of the tight lead-in time was the pressure that Bowe's engagement with the tour placed on her already busy workload for the ongoing programme at the Wexford Arts Centre itself. As Elizabeth White put it; *'Had we known how much time Catherine would need we could have built that in... We were already programmed up to 2009. Had we known that Catherine would have to give so much time to this we would have programmed accordingly. If the next TTE comes up we would need research time and then in 2009 the tour could happen...'*

Her Chairman, Karla Sanchez O'Connell fully endorsed this and the budgetary implications. *'If we were to do this again we would assign a coordinator, and also consider that in the budget as well because she (Catherine Bowe) did take a lot of time to put this together. These projects take a lot of time to plan and also to visit the venues... making sure that the work will function properly in each venue.'*

The venues Bowe secured were particularly interesting because they offered a variety of audience engagements and opportunities; ranging from a non-traditional venue (a hospital and day care centre) to a private gallery in a privately-owned historic castle with an established programme of high level, internationally acclaimed contemporary artists, and two publicly-funded multi-disciplinary art-centres<sup>5</sup>. Since the timeframe for *The Touring Experiment* was very tight Bowe had to be flexible in searching for venues and adapt to last minute availability.

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3 See footnote 2 above

4 Meeting with TTE in the Davenport Hotel, Dublin, 2/7/07

5 see previous footnotes 2 and 3

## **The Catalogue**

Once the decision to tour had been made it seemed immediately obvious that the exhibition should be accompanied by a catalogue. While this had not been a priority during the initial exhibition at Wexford, it was obvious that the level of personal contact between the curator and those monitoring and mediating the show on a daily basis, would not be possible when it travelled beyond its home base. A catalogue would provide a document, authorised by artists and curator, to act in their place, help to brand the exhibition as a product of the WAC and stamp the centre's ownership on it. Importantly for Wexford it would also serve as a living document of the first touring exhibition emanating from the WAC. With the support of the grant from *The Touring Experiment* Catherine Bowe went into action. She chose Cliodhna Shaffrey to be the lead writer of the catalogue with additional essays by Paul Murnahan, Mic Moroney and Moira Vincetelli on each of the three artists. The resulting catalogue, priced at €10.00 could then accompany the exhibition to its final venues.

## **Promotion**

It was agreed that, with the exception of Raheen Community Hospital which did not have an arts budget, each venue would promote the exhibition in their space, send out invitations to the exhibition and promote it through their normal publicity channels. *'Initially, Bowe said, I always thought that costs for all PR including invitations and posters would come out of the overall budget but I presumed that the venues would be in a position to design and arrange printing. As the tour evolved and the participating venues were unable to do these tasks due to lack of resources the idea to brand the show as a Wexford Arts Centre event became more important.'*

The design of the invitation was to be agreed by WAC but each venue could select a different image from the show for their own invitation, so long as the overriding look of this and any other publicity material should conform to the WAC specification and carry the WAC brand. Bowe was emphatic, *'It's important that we have the same invites, the same PR. And the branding, the branding should come from here'*.

Catherine Bowe undertook to design and write publicity posters for Raheen and agreed that Wexford would cover the cost of the invitation and postage there. She was confident that the other venues could be relied upon to carry out this aspect of the tour for themselves. As the tour progressed and changes had to be made to the schedule some changes to this arrangement were also necessary.

## **Audience -Outreach Activities**

The Audience is central to all successful arts events. Outreach activities are particularly important to developing a sense of ownership and comfort with contemporary art. Identifying the strengths of the different venues of the

tour Catherine Bowe allowed herself to go with tried and tested methods of outreach programming in each place while trying to provide a range of approaches to different audiences that might be appropriate for each venue. Wexford Arts Centre does not, as of now, have a clicker system to count visitors to exhibitions and this is also true of the venues covered by this case study.

During the hectic planning stage of this tour Outreach activities were signalled as desirable but were not fleshed out in any detail. When the exhibition was shown in Wexford the centre had arranged schools visits and invited the artists to give talks. However the professional practice talks that Bowe now regularly schedules were not a fixed part of the programme when *Surface Tension* was first shown there.

*'We did a schools workshop. At the time it wasn't as developed here, the outreach, as it is now. We have only started to do the professional talks. We did some talks with schools. Gerda worked with schools'. Elizabeth Whyte expanded on this, 'Gerda and Jane did little pottery workshops. Jane gave slide shows and it was great. She seemed to be in a different country in each one..'*

The outreach programme at Raheen, conducted on a voluntary basis by artist Nicola Henley was an eye-opener for everyone and brought out the highest levels of creativity from each of the artists. Catherine Bowe was enthusiastic,

*'Raheen is exceptional. Gerda is working with Nicola and some of the residential patients. Schools are coming in the afternoon. so it is an intergenerational project.*

*Juliana has come up with a very interesting plan for the residential patients. They don't like to walk ... but she is taking them for walks to gather leaves which they will use to make an artwork. She is also going to work with the men, making a coffee table with them.*

*I think the artists want to leave something behind. Jane is working with a local artist called Jane Seymour... All the work will be shown alongside the artists' work, or at least a sampling of the work... There are two stages for the workshop, first they will be making tiles and those tiles will become part of the entranceway. And then they will be making pods as well. Then all of the work will be shown together at the final event. Before we had thought of professional practice talks and lectures..."*

Bowe also points out that the highly interactive and innovative outreach activities that Nicola Henley wanted at Raheen were costly and placed unforeseen burdens on the budget but she had no doubt that this was worthwhile both for the immediate and visible benefits for both artists and clients in Raheen, and also for future learning for WAC.

The original proposal was for an outreach programme involving schools workshops in Lismore Castle Gallery or to use this venue for a panel

discussion about professional practice since the show combines three very different approaches to art-making. With the change of venue this plan was transferred to Broadstone. Because of time pressure Bowe felt that she could postpone discussion about similar activities in The Source until a later date. Elizabeth Whyte stressed the need to allow for each venue to programme what was best for their community. *'The impetus has to come from the local venue. They have their own artists for outreach.'*

Asked who would pay for outreach events, Bowe's answer was very straightforward.

*'In Raheen we helped... Nicola is very stretched. She does everything on a voluntary basis but thanks to the money for the TTE we are able to pay Nicola and Jane Seymour. They had a lack of resources. It almost as if we are sussing out a model...We are trying to find how best to do it for the future.'*

## **Insurance**

Insurance cover for the artworks in transit was fully covered at all times by the Wexford Arts Centre. WAC also insured the artworks, covered the hire and insurance of technical equipment for both Raheen and Broadstone, but these venues took responsibility for their own public liability insurance. The Source will fully insure all aspects of the exhibition during its sojourn there.

## **The First Venue**

The choice of Raheen came about when Catherine Bowe enquired about the possibility of taking the exhibition to the InisCealtra Arts Festival in Mountshannon in Co. Clare. Nicola Henley, the artistic Director of the festival could not accommodate the exhibition but immediately saw an opportunity for it in Raheen Community Hospital near Scariff Co. Clare.

Raheen Community Hospital is a hospital and day care centre for older people with a studio/exhibition space and a recently developed but hugely ambitious plan to maximise meaningful engagement with visual art for the clients and staff of the hospital. The hospital, encouraged by the artist Nicola Henley, and led by the matron Pauline McNamara and Senior Nurse in charge of the Day Care Facility, Ann O'Driscoll, enthusiastically agreed to take the exhibition when they saw the nature of the work and the art practices included in it, but the limitations of their workshop/exhibition space and the hospital's interactive requirements were extremely challenging. It was immediately clear that the smaller space available in the hospital and its ongoing use for studio workshops and other activities meant that the artworks had to be installed differently or exchanged for different examples. Jane Jermyn agreed to install some of her large Standing Forms outdoors, utilising a disused water feature, directly in front of the exhibition space for this purpose, and to suspend the pods from the ceiling, rather than risk damaging them on the studio floor as she could comfortably do in Wexford.

Gerda Teljeur decided to substitute some of her large works on paper for smaller works and Juliana Walters responded to the limited wall space by projecting her video work onto the floor. Instead of installing their exhibition and inviting the public in to view it in the traditional way, the artists were invited to work alongside the community of the hospital to create new, collaborative work and to show this together with a selection of their own material from the Wexford exhibition; to collaboratively create a different exhibition for this audience and this venue, while remaining faithful to the original concept of the tour.

The resulting exhibition at Raheen was very different to the original one in Wexford, despite an overlap of some of the artwork, and the same artists, since it now had a whole body of new work that had been collaboratively produced. The audience was largely confined to the clients and staff of the hospital, their visitors and friends; children from two local schools and their parents, and a small number of artists and supporters from the surrounding area.

A question that naturally arises for the producer here is to what extent one can allow for the new perspectives created by the new context while retaining the spirit and concept of the original show. While Elizabeth Whyte was conscious of the need for Wexford Arts Centre to retain ownership of their exhibition and the standards of display and promotion they had already brought to the project both she and Catherine Bowe were delighted with the outcome, willingly sacrificing a numerically significant audience for a deeply engaged and committed one and the exhibition was widely covered in the local press in Co. Clare. The Matron of the Hospital and Nicola Henley were equally enthusiastic about the resulting exhibition. The clients of the hospital and children from the local schools had worked together with the artists resulting in long term personal, creative and social benefits. The exhibition, in this venue, had become a truly intergenerational project and the Hospital acquired a body of artwork created on site, some of which will now be installed permanently in the hospital. The curator, the artists and the hospital staff felt rewarded for their work when an agreement was announced at the closing event of the exhibition that the local arts office would fund further creative work with local artists in Raheen.

The experience of touring to Raheen, the first venue outside of the WAC itself was positive and informative but also challenging. Both artists and Curator felt that it had been an outstanding success for a number of reasons; Catherine Bowe felt particularly encouraged by the way each of the three artists responded to the context of the hospital, the challenge of the space and the huge demands, in terms of time and process, that the collaborative work required of them. Jane Jermyn experimented with an outdoor setting for her pods and was delighted with the results, and all three of the artists were hugely energised by the challenge and the opportunity of working with the hospitals clients, seeing their own work through their engaged eyes, and tapping into their wisdom and cultural experience. The collaborative work they made as a result opened up new ideas for their personal practice in the future.

A disappointment for everyone involved in this particular leg of the tour was that the exhibition had to be taken down within a day of its final manifestation as the space was required for other activities in the hospital and new pressure on the budget arising from a change in the tour schedule made it preferable that the artists take the artwork away with them when they left Raheen, rather than incur additional transport and storage costs. All of the participants agree that this was a minor factor when balanced against the positive benefits they experienced from exhibiting there.

Despite the challenges of touring to a non-traditional venue Wexford Art Centre was unequivocally positive in its response to the experience. Karla Sanchez O'Connell was enthusiastic, *'also think it is important to be open to venues that do not traditionally show art... for instance Raheen, gems like that, to be open to the interaction... Within the artworld we sometimes get too blinded by what is happening in the regular spaces and it would be fantastic to look at the many other places that can also display art. I think the new venues help to break the prejudices that have been constructed around art...but also for the artists themselves... Art spaces like this help the interaction, help us to break down barriers...'*

## **The Second Venue**

The planned tour received something of a set-back in August when the Gallery at Lismore Castle had to withdraw from it. The loss of this venue, meant that the artists missed out on the opportunity to show their work in a context that has in its short life developed a reputation for showing very prestigious, celebrity artists and as such, attracts a very sophisticated and informed audience for contemporary art. The artists and curator took a collective decision to seek an alternative venue, preferably one in the Dublin area that might bring a similar audience. Their choice, influenced by availability, was the exhibition space at Broadstone Studios which enabled them to bring their exhibition into a practical and professional art-making environment. The fact that Broadstone Studios are in Dublin was a big factor influencing its choice although artists and curator were very aware of the difficulty of attracting an audience to such an out-of-the-city venue in the weeks surrounding Christmas. Apart from the small number of exhibitions that make up their annual programme Broadstone Studios lease out their exhibition area to artists and curators. WAC and the artists took the decision to hire the space and to provide all of the technical, security and promotional support required to produce the exhibition. Since the venue was a late substitution for the cancelled Lismore Castle Gallery this added up to a substantial additional burden on existing resources for the tour.

The exhibition space at Broadstone provided new artistic challenges. While the artists had readily agreed to scale their exhibition down and to work collaboratively at Raheen, both they and the curator wanted to prioritise the professional presentation of their work in this studio complex and to revert to the full scale exhibition they had begun with in Wexford. The open nature of the space and its honest revelation of its original function as a

factory forced new technical and artistic solutions to the installation of all of the works. The curator and artists had to work out a very different, more integrated plan for the exhibition in place of the separate galleries in WAC while another factor was the contrast between the classical 19th century ambience of the galleries at Wexford and the more industrial, 20th century one at Broadstone. The artists once again responded to the challenge of showing their work in a very different aesthetic environment and welcomed the insights that the new surroundings provided into it. Catherine Bowe brought her technicians from Wexford, Declan Cody and Ollie Dempsey, along to resolve issues about lighting, installation of electronic equipment and to overcome the problem of showing delicate works on paper on unplastered brickwork. This reflects an unscheduled extra commitment from Wexford Arts Centre as the hiring arrangement at Broadstone meant that WAC had to provide its own technical backup. Contrary to her earlier expectations Bowe and her team had to spend four days in Dublin perfecting this exhibition installation, and she admits that some of their presentation choices were more expensive than they had hoped. e.g. They reduced the effect of the rough plasterwork by blacking out the space and using entirely artificial lighting, but had to compensate for this by installing light boxes under Jane Jermyn's Pods. Once again Bowe was positive about the outcome, pleased with the installation and delighted to find that the challenges it brought proved to be a very good way of consolidating the team. They have worked together in a space other than their own and problem solved outside of their usual comfort zone. This was a great test for them and one which they emerged from with greater confidence. To quote Bowe, *'you can only benefit from doing things like this'*.

The artists agreed to invigilate the exhibition themselves in order to keep costs down.

There was a new promotional challenge also. Since Broadstone is located slightly outside the city centre in Dublin and the exhibition there spanned the Christmas holiday period, promotion of the exhibition became a crucial enterprise. Bowe agreed to look into electronic forms of advertising and sent out reminders for the launch event as well as regular invitations, all of which now became the responsibility of the producers rather than the venue. Again the effort paid off. The exhibition was very positively reviewed by Aidan Dunne in *The Irish Times* on January 9th 2008, so that both producers and artists felt more than justified in their choice of what he described as *'an off Broadway Dublin venue.'*

Broadstone is primarily a studio complex with a regular throughput of practising artists and curators. For this reason Bowe planned to prioritise aspects of professional practice as an outreach activity at this venue and to arrange for a public panel discussion which would engage fellow artists in public debate about the issues involved in touring an exhibition such as *Surface Tension*. Hopefully this would also attract an additional audience, in the traditionally quiet time after Christmas.

However audience figures for the exhibition at Broadstone were, at first sight, disappointing with about 200 people visiting the exhibition overall and this included those who attended the opening event and the panel discussion at the end. The location, the time of year, which meant a closure for a week at Christmas, the fact that three times the national average rainfall was recorded for the first two weeks in January 08, lack of public transport to the site, signage problems, the lack of a direct phone line and a leaking roof, were all influencing factors in this. Gerda Teljeur listed all the promotional difficulties they encountered such as the fact that they could not use the banner which had been made especially for this venue, the obscurity of the site, the distraction of Christmas but went on, *'the overall turnout was much lower than I expected. But I was very pleased with the specific people who did come to see the exhibition. The panel discussion was an interesting addition and gave more people an incentive to come.'* (G. Teljeur, email to the author, 21/1/2008)

However, if audience numbers were modest, both critics and fellow artists featured highly among those who came so that the producer and the artists felt more than adequately recompensed for their efforts. In short the desired target audience of professionals was achieved at Broadstone, complementing the community focus at the previous venue. An interesting outcome was the high proportion of craft artists who came along, attracted by the presence of ceramic work in a 'fine art' exhibition. This factor aroused considerable comment during the panel discussion, which was attended by 39 people.

### **The Third Venue**

The Source Arts Centre in Thurles, Co. Tipperary is to be the third venue after Wexford itself. A purpose-built new Arts Centre, designed by McCulloch and Mulvin Architects and opened in 2006, it will mean a very different presentation of the exhibition once again. Unfortunately the timeframe of this leg of the exhibition will mean that it cannot be discussed within the remit of this report. Catherine Bowe's expectation is that the experience at the Source will be similar to the original process in Wexford itself but with the benefit of two other venues behind her she is open to new outreach possibilities and new ways of presenting the show.

### **The Proposed Final Venue**

The final venue, the Dunamaise Arts Centre in Portlaoise has had to be withdrawn from the tour. The reasons for this cancellation are important - the nature of the space there mean that it would be very difficult to provide for the safety of delicate free-standing artwork such as Jane Jermyn's Ceramics, especially during gallery workshops which are popular at Dunamaise. Reluctantly then, and despite their mutual interest in presenting the show there, Louise Donlon, the venue manager at Dunamaise, and Catherine Bowe decided to change their plans. A considerable amount of energy and discussion had gone in to the preliminary planning for this, but

the shortness of the planning time meant that Catherine Bowe was not able to make a curatorial visit to Dunamais to assess its suitability for this particular body of artwork. Both additional time and/or financial resources could have resolved this, either by the selection of a different venue, or by putting money into finding imaginative solutions to the presentation of vulnerable artwork in the space available. Unfortunately neither was possible.

## **Section 4 - What now? What was learnt? Were the desired outcomes achieved?**

With the experience of two tour venues in addition to the original exhibition in their home space behind her what would Catherine Bowe see as the outcome of all the work that she and the artists put into this tour? More pertinently would they, and the Board and Director of the WAC, be willing to repeat this experiment?

Catherine Bowe brought all of her considerable experience of curating exhibitions to planning and budgeting for this tour. Although she had never originated a tour before both she and the artists involved, the Director and Board of the WAC, and the venues so far are very pleased with their participation in this experiment.

Despite an overwhelming burden of work, taxing all the resources of a small regional arts centre, the answer to the question above, then, is a resounding yes, but the learning curve has been a significant one.

Two factors are particularly significant; timeframe and budget.

### **Timeframe**

As previously mentioned the timeframe for the planning process for the visual arts tours in *The Touring Experiment* was very tight. *Surface Tension* would not even have been proposed had it not already existed and so did not have to be curated from nothing. The artwork had already been made, the exhibition had been tested, and crucially, an excellent relationship between the artists themselves and the artists and the curator had already been established. Without that this tour would not have been possible.

The short timeframe at the proposal stage from February to March 16th 2007, for a touring circuit that could be largely completed by December 31st of the same year, barely enabled Catherine Bowe, who was committed to ongoing work at the WAC, to identify the available venues, to introduce her project to them and allow time for them to consider the request and revert to her with terms of agreement. This was compounded by the fact that most of the art centres and public exhibition spaces around Ireland had

already finalised their plans for 2007 some months before the *TTE* invitation to submit applications was announced. A network of similarly scaled venues or a curatorial network would have helped to minimise this problem but sadly no such network exists as yet although signs of informal networks are beginning to emerge.

Bowe also points to the usefulness of some kind of a website, detailing availability. *'I think even if there was a web site... I was thinking before about programming children's work. There was a lovely exhibition in Draíocht called Playthings. When children get in there they run. You'd love to give children something that they could run into. If there was one central touring exhibitions website... maybe it wouldn't work but if you could just look up Playthings e.g. you could click on it and there was a date when it is available, and the fee is there, and the fee could go to the artists. Draíocht would give you the PR. That might be one way of bringing things together.'*

Tours work best when the curator is free to choose venues on the basis of suitability of space, critical environment and engaged local audiences. A repeated refrain in Bowe's conversation is the need to ensure that the exhibition space is appropriate for the work. Following availability means that the curator cannot fully control this or plan the timing as s/he might wish. For this tour Catherine Bowe had to work with a schedule that meant significant gaps between each venue. This meant that the artwork would have to be stored and insured between venues or returned to the artists. Either option carries its own burdens. For *Surface Tension* the decision was that the artists would take their work back to the studio between venues. The exhibition had, therefore, to be dispersed and re-assembled each time.

Time restrictions at the proposal and planning stage meant that, at best, Catherine Bowe could only work by telephone and email with like-minded curators and venue managers. She could not make site visits. The cancellation of the final venue from the tour is a direct outcome of this shortcoming. The timeframe also allowed very little time to develop contractual agreements. This has not, in the past, been a serious pre-requisite in Ireland, but is increasingly a necessary component. In this instance it might have prevented the cancellation, late in the life of the tour, of one of the venues, with the knock-on difficulty that this obliged the producers to find additional resources to commercially hire an alternative venue. Wexford Arts Centre now feels that if they had had the time to draw up contractual agreements with the venues from the outset they might have prevented changes to the tour schedule while the process would have alerted them to some useful issues. As Bowe says, *'It was such a short time. We are only discovering now what should be in a contract. It would be really good (to have one), especially for venues that have no experience. Just reading the contract tells you a lot about what you should expect'*.

The need to retain money to cover the unanticipated costs of the Broadstone

venue had a direct impact on the exhibition at Raheen. Costs were saved by taking down the exhibition at Raheen only one day after its final manifestation there, since the artists were already there and could transport the work without the cost of return visits.

## **The Budget**

The budget for the tour was planned to cover artists' fees, including all outreach activities, visits to the venues, and transport of the artworks, some documentation at each venue, invitation cards and launches at the first two venues, and the production of the catalogue. It was a tight budget, tightly and successfully administered, but it did not allow for the cancellation and substitution of a venue and the costs associated with that. The additional burden that a commercial hire, and the costs of travelling to and from Dublin placed on the tour were considerable. This was offset to some degree by bringing technical staff from WAC to Dublin for the installation and take down at Broadstone, placing extra demands on the art centre's own busy programme. When asked if she felt that the budget was a disaster in view of all the extra work that she put in, Bowe was, as ever, upbeat. *'It is not a disaster but it's very tight. We are paying the artists an exhibition fee per exhibition. It's minimal. It's not huge but we are also paying them for workshops. They are putting in a lot of extra time... They are putting a lot into it themselves. I know they are getting a lot out of it as well. I don't think my time has been properly costed. And I am putting more work than I anticipated into it and I am conscious that it's a drain on the centre.'*

The catalogue, which Bowe feels is one of the important outcomes both for the artists and for the centre, absorbed a considerable part of the budget and also took a lot of time, but she has no doubt about its worth. In addition to its value to the artists the catalogue documents and records Wexford Arts Centre's increasing presence and participation in the visual arts in Ireland. It promotes their brand. Aidan Dunne's review of the exhibition at Broadstone Studios in *The Irish Times* was also seen by both WAC and the artists as a very positive achievement, made possible only by touring to Dublin. They all acknowledge the difficulty of getting a show covered in the national media unless it can make it to Dublin.

## **A look back at promotion and audience**

It is inevitable that the temporal and financial limitations affected the promotion of the tour. While the tour was mentioned in all publicity emanating from WAC, and from each of the venues there was no money for a big publicity plan and no time to pursue alternatives. Looking back over the process, from a half way point, Juliana Walters, summed up the learning in relation to promotion as follows; *'Ireland is a relatively small country and in order for a visual art exhibition to maintain its dynamic and audience interest throughout the touring process, perhaps it needs, from the outset, to initiate an umbrella marketing plan, where the overall concept of the exhibition*

*would be heavily promoted.*' (J. Walters, email to author, 15/1/2008)

The exhibition had a large but untypical audience at Raheen Community Hospital. The whole project was well covered in the local newspapers and there was a high degree of interaction between local artists, the artists in the exhibition, and the hospital community, including some schools in the area, with an unexpectedly large turnout for the final public event. The focus at Raheen was on active engagement with the local community and the results surpassed expectations. Excluding the final celebratory event, approximately 200 people visited the exhibition, and an additional 150 participated in the workshops. From the outset the curator and artists looked to Broadstone Studios or Lismore Castle Gallery for a more professionally engaged audience. As described previously, the general audience proved to be disappointingly small in Broadstone, but all of the artists and the producers agree that it made up in quality for what it may have lacked in quantity. Out of the 200 people who visited it one person bought one of the artworks, and 15 catalogues were sold in addition to those circulated by the artists and the WAC. Most importantly, *The Irish Times* carried a very positive review by Aidan Dunne. Gerda Teljeur sums up the artists' attitudes to their experience at Broadstone. *'Receiving such a good Review in The Irish Times was a great boost. It more than made up for the far lower than expected attendance in Broadstone. Everyone seems to have read it. I got so many good reactions from it.'* (G. Teljeur, email to the author, 21/1/2008)

Bowe expects that the audience for the final leg of the exhibition, The Source in Thurles, will resemble the general audience for the original exhibition in Wexford. Since approximately 700 people attended the exhibition in Wexford, it seems reasonable to expect a similar attendance at Source although the fact that none of the artists is based in Tipperary may negatively impact on numbers to some degree.

## **The Learning**

Catherine Bowe would recommend a two-tier approach to future touring exhibitions. The first of these should facilitate all aspects of the research, from planning the exhibition to programming outreach and making site visits. The second tier for the process is the tour itself and its practical implementation, and evaluation.

Bowe's own time reflects a further big commitment from the WAC as the decision to participate in *TTE* was made some time after the Centre had already agreed a programme for the year, with a workload to which she was also deeply committed. Both the curator and the Director agree that they would plan this differently if the opportunity were presented to them again.

While Bowe is positive about future touring she readily acknowledges that next time she would think twice before embarking on a project with such limited time for planning. Extra time would pre-empt some of their difficulties and she would also factor in enough of a budget to provide for

a dedicated tour manager, or at least to cover Bowe's other work while she retains that role.

A throwaway comment of Catherine Bowe's about the usefulness of having a colleague to discuss layout and technical issues should also be considered in the future. *'When you are trying to do a layout it is really useful to have your own technician, someone to bounce ideas with'*. Curators often feel isolated when planning a tour in other venues. This is something that could be pre-empted through the provision of more curatorial networks as well as realistic budgets that enable the back up of your own technical advisor, who represents the needs of the producers, rather than the venues along the tour. As Elizabeth Whyte points out; *'There should be a tech person from here who knows the work. And someone the artists know and are comfortable with. You can't depend on the venues for that...'* Bowe drew attention to an unanticipated but welcome outcome of bringing WAC's own team to Broadstone to install. When a team is working away from home there is a level of teamwork, of bonding and of learning what each person can contribute, that is not so obvious on homeground. For the WAC team, who had only been working together for a year, this was a particularly positive discovery.

Finally Bowe and the team at Wexford acknowledge that their assumptions about other venues should have been tested before embarking on a tour, had time allowed. They agree that their initial understanding of the amount of time and money required to implement the tour and to allow for contingencies had to be revised upward several times, but all involved believe that the overall experience has been a rewarding one.

Asked if they had achieved their original objectives of enabling artists, Bowe smiles and refers to the artists themselves, who have been unstinting in their appreciation of the opportunities the tour afforded them. Jane Jermyn was quick to point to the biggest learning moment for her. *'Less is more'*, she told the audience at the Panel discussion in Broadstone Studios, *'I learned to select down'*. Outlining a number of concerns that she had at the start of the project, to do with unfamiliarity with the venues, her fellow artists, the curator and the pressure of the tight time frame, Juliana Walters said, *'I feel both personally and professionally that so far I have developed and gained considerably from the overall experience. This is predominantly due to the fact that we came together as a team, each person and their views were respected and considered. Each matter relating to the project was always met and discussed professionally and seriously. I feel Wexford Arts Centre was very open and inclusive in its endeavour to move the tour forward. All this made the project more exciting and dynamic than I had previously expected'*. (J. Walters, email to author, 15/1/2008)

Her appreciation was matched by Gerda Teljeur's. *'I always felt that the artist was the most important in the whole proces'*, Teljeur said, and she went on to add that the tour helped her to overcome the feeling of isolation that

most artists experience in the studio. *'Working with other artists and with the support of the WAC really changed that'*. Other benefits that Tejeur mentioned were an increase in her confidence as an artist, the good review in *The Irish Times*, the catalogue which *'gave us something tangible and important for further promotions'*, and very importantly, *'the process also fostered a closer partnership between artist and the Arts Centre'*. (G. Teljeur, email to the author, 21/1/2008)

The WAC has tested its tour on two very different audiences so far and felt very affirmed by the community response in Raheen, on the one hand, and the artists/critics response at Broadstone. The WAC brand has been logged on the visual arts circuit. As Bowe said they first realised this when they rang to enquire about bringing the tour to Broadstone and Jacinta Lynch, the director there, said she was aware of their programme already through the tour. They now have what Aidan Dunne described as *'a handsome publication'* (*Irish Times*, Jan 9th 2008) in the form of the exhibition catalogue to carry their name beyond their home turf and they have had a good review in a national newspaper to add to the very good local publicity they are accustomed to. At the outset Elizabeth Whyte said she particularly wanted to show that WAC could provide an excellent service for artists and public alike in relation to visual arts. They now feel that they have mastered the process of touring visual art and can look forward to repeating it on a larger scale in the future, or more ambitiously, travel outside Ireland. They know that they have the expertise necessary, they have taken on a process that provided them with a variety of audiences, new outreach methodologies, developed relationships with other venues and curators, greatly extended the benefit to artists of an exhibition and lived up to Elizabeth Whyte's dream, *'to give them that opportunity, to tour under our name'*. They have taken the programme of the WAC and given it a life and a branding far removed from where it originated, with modest resources and minimum planning time. As artist, Juliana Walters remarked, *The Touring Experiment* was a very exciting concept that provided *'a really fruitful platform for artists and curators to not only broaden their audience, but more importantly, it gives individuals/groups a supported environment and the opportunity and time to further evolve and nurture an existing project. It can push the work to another level way beyond what the deadline of a once off exhibition can offer.'* (Juliana Walters, email to author, 15/1/2008)

Catherine Bowe's summary of the process so far is to point out how rewarding the tour has been to date. *'The experience of touring Surface Tension was an extremely positive one for me personally, and for the Wexford Arts Centre, and although there were challenges with the timeframe, they did not outweigh the learning experience gained from the tour. I think I can speak for the artists and say they too, found the tour very rewarding. I think the Arts Council is on an exciting path of developing a means to tour visual art exhibitions and developing a network of host venues and we were grateful to be given the opportunity to participate.'*